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An Essay
on
Cholera Morbus
By
John J. Myers
of
South Carolina
For
the degree of M. D.
In
the University of Pennsylvania.
1824.

Cholera Morbus.

I have made choice of Cholera Morbus for the subject of my inaugural dissertation, not in consequence of having any thing particularly new either in theory or practice to bring forward; but because it is a disease frequently prevalent in my section of the country.

After acknowledging therefore that I am indebted to authors for the most of the theoretical notions advanced in the following treatise, I will proceed to give a description of the complaint under consideration.

It is for the most part peculiar to warm climates and prevails in its greatest extent during the summer and fall seasons, though it may occasionally occur in almost any climate and at any season of the year —— By Cullen and all

the older writers it was maintained that this disease depended upon an increased secretion of acrid and vitiated bile. But it now seems to be pretty well established, that Cholera Morbus is a gastric affection. The original irritation therefore seems to be in the stomach, and is extended through the medium of a sympathetic connexion to the liver —

For a confirmation of this opinion let us advert to the causes of the complaint, which are constriction of the surface from cold, morbid impressions made on the stomach by crude and irritating ingesta, intemperance and debauchery in eating and drinking and sometimes marsh miasmata — The debility produced on the extreme vessels of the surface, by the irregular and excess of

action to which they are exposed during the summer and autumnal months, renders them peculiarly liable on exposure to cold, to be thrown into a state of entire torpidity. By a consent of parts existing between the surface and alim-entary canal, the stomach receives the morbid impression and it is extended from thence to the hepatic system —

The capillaries of the liver sympa-thising with those on the surface, fall into a similar state of constriction, by which means a return of blood from the liver is prevented and the ballance of the circulation entirely bro-ken. And if the system remains in this state for any length of time, a total suppression of the biliary secretion takes place, together with a painful

distension of the abdomen and a shrink-
-ing of all the external parts —
In a short time however by a powerful
effort of nature to relieve herself, togeth-
-er with the assistance of remedies, a
reaction takes place, perspiration is induc-
-ed and the circulation equalised —
An increased secretion of bile now takes
place, as a consequence of the plethoric
state in which the liver had been previ-
-ously labouring — And thus we have
explained an effect which has for ages
past been considered a cause of the
disease — This position however receives
further support from the fact, that the
first evacuations consist chiefly of the
contents of the alimentary canal, and
that bile is not discharged until the
hepatic system becomes secondarily

affected. But when once the liver receives the morbid impressions, and reaction takes place, it is stimulated to morbid action; hence those profuse discharges of bilious matter so common in the disease —

Nor is it at all reasonable to suppose that the bile is unusually acrimonious or vitiated, as has been contended by some writers. The reverse of this seems to be the most rational conclusion, when we consider how rapidly and in what quantities it is secreted —

As it is generally described, Cholera Morbus consists in copious discharges of bilious matter upwards and downwards, accompanied with painful gripes and spasms. It generally comes on with tenderness of the abdomen, pain, distension and according to Sydenham,

"Vehement vomitings and difficult and painful dejections of ill conditioned fluids, agony and inflammation of the intestines and abdomen, Cardialgia, thirst, a quick pulse, often small and unequal; heat and anxiety, nausea and Colliquative sweats, spasms of the arms and legs, fainting, coldness of the extremities and other symptoms of equal danger, which terrify the by standers and kill the patient in twenty four hours."—

There are several of the bowel affections which in some particulars, slightly resemble Cholera; but it may be distinguished from diarrhoea and dysentary by the alvine evacuations in the former being pure bile, unmixed with blood or mucus and with very little faeces. The two latter diseases are also

very seldom attended with vomiting —
In cholica pictonum there is sometimes a considerable quantity of bilious matter vomited up, but Cholera may always be distinguished from it by the bowels in the former remaining obstinately constipated —

With respect to the prognosis in this complaint, it may be observed that where the vomiting and purging continue violent, attended with great prostration of strength, the respiration hurried, the abdomen much distended and painful, hickup, spasms of the extremities or convulsions, the event is unfavourable — But where the symptoms gradually subside, especially the vomiting followed by a gentle perspiration and succeeded by repose, a speedy recovery

may be expected —

Having said thus much with respect to the pathology and character of Cholera Morbus, I shall now proceed to lay down the treatment which seems to me best calculated to give relief. As a general rule the indication in the first stage of this complaint, is to evacuate the alimentary canal, and for this purpose we may commence with an emetic — The ancient practice was to dilute and wash out the contents of the stomach and intestines by a free exhibition of mild demulcent fluids, administered per orem et anum — When by these means the alimentary canal had been completely evacuated, opiates were given for the purpose of calming irritability and reducing

spasmodic action. This mode of treating Cholera was introduced by Sydenham and has been followed ever since by the generality of physicians —

But when it is at all necessary to empty the stomach, I can see no reason why it should not be done by the exhibition of an emetic. This practice so far as I know originated with Dr. Chapman, who has for a long time been in the habit of prescribing emetics, and observes that he can perceive no objection to their employment — Among the articles which may be selected under such circumstances, Ipecacuhana is undoubtedly the best. It not only very effectually evacuates the stomach, but also by its antispasmodic properties produces a general relaxation of the

system and determines to the surface - Having accomplished this much, we should in the next place endeavour to calm irritability and remove pain — For this purpose we may administer opium in the form of pills; but in case they are not retained or do not have the desired effect we should employ opiate injections — As auxiliary to these means we may apply warm fomentations to the epigastrium and abdomen — The best of these perhaps is Dr. Chapman's Clove bag, which he strongly recommended in his lectures; it is prepared by quilting a bag with Cloves and wringing it out of hot Spirits, then laying it over the parts already mentioned - Most of the remedies calculated to relieve vomiting may also be used, and the best is lime water

and milk — If however our patient be at all plethoric or robust, we may without hesitation, before resorting to these last mentioned remedies, employ venesection. It must be recollected however that the pulse in this case is not always to be our guide. No matter how feeble the pulse may be, if the patient has only a common degree of vigour we may bleed without danger —

It is observed by the professor of practice, that it may be laid down as a general rule without a single exception, in the early stages of all diseases attended with much pain, if you find the pulse weak, it is to be considered as an indication of a depressed condition of the system, which will be most effectually overcome by the direct evacuants, recollecting however

to proceed with much caution. In a case of Cholera which admits of any doubt with respect to the propriety of using the lancet, it should be preceded by the warm bath, which is always beneficial, especially so in the case now under consideration. We should even then draw blood slowly, observing the effects produced and allow time for the energies of the system to be developed — If however the treatment already detailed does not afford relief, a blister should be applied over the region of the stomach, and in alarming cases to the extremities also. With respect to the purgatives which may be used, Calomel will be found to answer best, and it should be combined with opium. Cholera as it occurs in our own country, will generally yield to the treatment

already mentioned; there is however a species of the disease described in Johnsons work on tropical climates, which is of a much more dangerous character, and requires to be met, with a very free use of the lancet, the warm bath and Sampson doses of Calomel, combined with opium — As this form of the disease however seldom or never occurs in our climate, I shall not take further notice of it —

Relapses of Cholera are quite frequent, and to guard against them, all exciting causes should be avoided, as exposure to hot sun, night air, improper articles of diet, excess in eating and drinking, violent paroxysms of passion and particularly cold extremities — The bowels should be kept in a

soluble state by mild laxatives, as magnesia, castor oil &c. Tonics may now be administered, and the best perhaps are Quassia, Columbo &c — The wearing of flannel next the skin should not be neglected. It is very important in the prophylactic treatment of this as well as of all the other bowel affections —